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ART IN DRESS

ARTISTS' VIEWS ON WOMAN'S DRESS.

III.



HOWEVER pointed precept may be, anecdote is sometimes more effective, and a suggestive story from his own experience will most happily convey Mr. J. Carroll Beckwith's best advice to women in regard to dress. A wealthy lady in Paris, unpleasantly distinguished by a red nose, went to Worth for a costume for a special occasion. After studying her peculiarities that celebrated man arrayed her in a black and

white striped silk dress made with great simplicity, and under her chin he placed a great garnet bow and another in her hair. Her friends were gratified at her distinguished appearance and observed with pleasure the purity of her complexion. On meeting her afterward in the street with her accustomed beacon light, Mr. Beckwith discovered that it had paled only in the deeper glow of the garnet bows. The genius of Worth had succeeded in doing what doctors and hygiene had vainly essayed, and for the time had once more put her nose into proper relation with the rest of her face.

A great secret of dress undoubtedly lies in effacing the weak points and accenting the good ones. Dress may be compared in this respect, says Mr. Beckwith, to the arrangement of a stage. No director would place his star on one side and on the other a magnificent portière, a richly carved cabinet and a great porcelain vase, for the reason that the public attention would at once be called away from the principal point. On the contrary, he would group the portière, the cabinet and the vase, and in the centre he would place his star, thus securing a single and concentrated effect. This is what the women who wish to appear well-dressed must do, and to do it requires some consideration.

While it cannot be claimed that women give too little heed to dress, their efforts are often much misdirected. Mrs. Dolly Madison has wisely said that women "cannot pay too great attention to themselves at the toilette, nor too little after they leave it." No women, in Mr. Beckwith's opinion, so well understand the secret of dress, as it is implied in the above quotation, as the women of southern Europe, particularly the Spanish women, who instinctively concentrate the observer's attention on their most attractive features. He speaks with admiration of their management of color. Another woman will dispose obtrusively the red and yellow of her costume, but the Spaniard will veil it mysteriously in black, and her bit of pure color she uses in the flower half hidden in the coils of her hair behind her ear, making it only part of the surroundings which are to set off her face and not a thing of itself.

Of flowers it may be remarked, in passing, that Mr. Beckwith objects to their use, except around the head and face. The immense "bouquets de corsage," which are the delight of the women of the present day, are only too effective in concealing graceful contours, and are really no more than a sort of excrescence on the dress, and in no way an integral part of it. Equally objectionable is the use of flowers in the skirt of a dress with which they have no possible relation. But nothing can be prettier than the clustering of flowers about the neck, when they garland the face like a picture or gleam in the hair where their tints may blend with those of the complexion.

This use of color, whether in flowers or otherwise,

gives something positive, vigorous, and wholesome to women. Mr. Beckwith has no sympathy with the languor of the æsthetic movement, with its sad tints, and its limp attitudes. At the same time his views on dress have some points in common with those of the "æsthetes," although he expresses them with more robustness. The most beautiful dress, he considers, is the riding habit with a Jacqueminot rose for its only bit of color. Its charm, if analyzed, lies in its simplicity, its long, scarcely broken lines limning the figure, and in what may be called the tone of the picture, which is found in the large patch of neutral or quiet color broken by its own lights and shadows. All these qualities are easily applicable to dress of all kinds, even in its most magnificent aspect.

For luxurious dress nothing is more suitable than the plushes, with their high lights and deep shadows. Like all artists, Mr. Beckwith prefers the princesse dress, but admits the basque, the waist, of course, to be perfectly fitted upon that ideal form which artists always take for granted, and which requires neither corset nor whalebone, for against these Mr. Beckwith joins in the general protest. As the upper part of the body contributes to the setting off of the countenance it can be treated with the same freedom as any other frame, so long as it does not assert itself above the more important face.

Appropriate richness can be found in the cutting of the sleeves. Mr. Beckwith admires the puff on the shoulders and on the elbows, particularly when it appears lighter in texture and color, and equally condemns the use of different materials and different colors in the sleeves, a practice by which women have so long dismembered themselves. Apropos of this there is a painting in the Corcoran Art Gallery at Washington, which shows the only allowable use of a different color in the sleeve. In this picture the figure, which is that of a grand dame walking in one of the forest paths at Fontainebleau, wears a green velvet robe. The sleeves, which are long and tight, half veiling the hand, are of a yellow lustrous silk showing pink tones, and are buttoned on to the shoulders, the soft puffs of the thin white undersleeve appearing between the buttons. The puffs, which are formed without apparent design, give the sleeve a charming suggestiveness which in no way appears in the sleeve that fashion alone has sanctioned.

The most artistic waist, Mr. Beckwith thinks, is the laced bodice which the Roman peasant girl wears. This she breaks at the waist-line with her gayly banded apron, but the waist itself is of corset length. This might be handsomely adapted in modern costumes. In it we get variety which the fashionable dressmaker seeks in trimming, but variety which in no way interferes with the beauty of form. Such waists are even more lovely laced over some pale harmonious color. In the use of trimmings those that are flat are to be preferred. Of these none are more beautiful than jet, with its flashing broken lights. This can be applied according to the figure, if large in vertical lines, if small disposed in curves or crosswise. Jet bands are especially good on sleeves, in stripes if the arm is large and in curving lines if it is small. But in no case ought jet to be used on the skirt.

The theory of dress advanced by Mr. Beckwith, which consists in bringing forward the good points and concealing the bad, when applied to the skirt demands that it be left as simple and plain as possible. Here there is nothing to call attention to, and the natural lines should be left to their own disposition, while the color should be quiet or neutral. To this, it can be imagined, few women will be willing to subscribe, the skirt until very recently having been made the chief object of the dressmaker's care, and although the tailor-made clothes have caused it to suffer a certain eclipse it will take some time to enforce upon it a proper subordination. At the same time every woman will agree to the picturesqueness of the scant simple skirt—in pictures.

The only other point to be accented is the feet.

This is now agreed upon by both women and artists, as is shown in the dainty hosiery which is now every woman's delight and pride. I have heard an amusing and truthful story of a lady awakened at night by the cry of fire which proved to be in her own house, who in the only moment left to her saved her silk stockings. After the fire it was found that her little son had rescued her diamonds. Mr. Beckwith would go even farther, and would like a revival of the "talons rouges" of Louis XIV. In fact he has persuaded one client to have made a pair of black satin slippers with red heels.

To return from the feet to the head, Mr. Beckwith considers that the English women of the present day excel in hair-dressing. Having well-shaped heads they dress them with the simple coil at the back, low if the neck is not good, and higher if the neck can depend on its own beauty. American women rarely have stately column-shaped necks. Their necks are long enough, but tend to sinews. When the neck will bear exposure the less that conceals it the better; otherwise it should be veiled with soft laces and ruchings. Nothing, however, is better than the ruff with its broken outlines and soft shadows from the face.

Lastly, Mr. Beckwith thinks that American women, whose adaptability exceeds that of the women of every other nation, should pay some attention to the scientific study of color, as unfortunately a correct taste in color is not with every one a matter of intuition. With such study, although they might not attain its best use, they at least would be able to escape going far wrong.

MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

Notes on Dress.

HERE and there, during the past season, I have seen "æsthetic" dresses cropping up amid our fashionable assemblages, and standing out with vivid effect against the background of modern French modistes' art. Dresses, perhaps, of creamy satin, so puffed and wrinkled, so gored and seamed, as to convert a respectably robust woman into a being long-waisted and sinuous—what Lewis Carroll would call a "slithy cove." These costumes are as yet semi-occasional in American society. In England the fashion has a large following, and no doubt we shall ere long be posing as successfully in such attire as if we were all Lady Saphirs or Lady Janes. It is morally impossible that we should escape altogether the threatened infection, even if there were no other motor more powerful than the polite insistence of modern fashion upon slenderness of outline! For there are some bounds that even chamois leather finds it difficult to compass, "bien entendu."

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As a rule Americans avoid originality in dress, while as ready as one sheep is to follow another over the wall when one of their leaders gives the signal for a new departure. Our élégantes are so generally remarked for frank allegiance to the becoming, that we need therefore have no fear for the adoption of such features in æsthetic attire as may be dowdy or grotesque. I do not look for the appearance of Mrs. Cimabue Brown's mop coiffure in any of the Fifth Avenue drawing-rooms, or yet for the "robes loosely flowing, hair as free" of the other faction of the party. Rather may we expect to see the best features of the new movement domesticated here. Gowns simply made, depending for effect on harmonious tint and graceful drapery, rich stuffs in low tones of color, real laces returning to their own again, have a charm that no one with just and thoroughly cultivated taste in dress can deny.

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AMONG the new imported stuffs which Englishwomen are adopting—despite the patriotic struggle some great ladies have recently begun to uphold the banner of their home-made sheeny fabrics, stiff and in-

artistic, such as alpaca, barège and satin cloths—is Umritza cloth. This is a cashmere made of purest Indian wool, fine, warm and clinging, tinted in myrtle greens, terra cotta and Venetian reds, peacock blue, and dead-leaf brown. Nagpore silks are also a delight to the idealists; although actually dyed and stamped in England, they, like other eastern fabrics, are soft and lustrous. Tussore, Mysore and pongee silks are still used abundantly, the dyes employed for them in modern days giving a wider latitude in choice to the purchaser than when she was limited to buff and écru as of old. Madras muslins of the finer sort are gorgeously decorated by having the pattern darned in silk and gold; and for drapery the sheer folds are unsurpassed, as is any fine muslin unspoiled by starch.

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PASSING from modern Oriental luxuries to those of France, how wonderfully beautiful are the new damasks imitating such fabrics as those made immortal by the brush of old masters! These splendid stuffs seem in their brown and yellow lustres to have imprisoned the sunshine of Titian's canvases; and their blues and pinkish reds might have been cut from the frames of Paul Veronese, or of Paris Bordone. With these sumptuous folds, one involuntarily associates some large blonde beauty, with eyes like sherry wine, whose auburn locks escape from their cushions over a throat of snow, collared with strings of pearl! Truly there is no excuse for a woman not making a picture of herself in our artistic days if—she can afford it!

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NOT only the first expense of the stuff has to be considered, but the fashioning of it must be intrusted to some artificer who is enlightened enough to dispense with furbelows when dealing with rich material. For such talent, such judgment, we in America pay at a costly rate. Next comes the indispensable accompaniment of rare lace, which alone assorts with these imitations of the old webs of Venice and Genoa and Lyons. Add the jewels, and give a thought to the chairs and couches, the portières and the cushions that should form a suitable background, and your Titian or Veronese gown becomes an alarming luxury.

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NEVERTHELESS, sixteenth century dresses are imported and worn this season with picturesque effect. A very much laced-in gown, made "all of a piece," and cut from amber satin, was worn at a Christmas dinner in New York. This one had puffed sleeves, a plain skirt unadorned save by the black velvet "aumônière" hung to a wrought gold chatelaine, and a high black velvet ruff. There was some excitement among the feminine guests during the period after dinner, when, left to their own resources, women exchange confidences, while registering mental notes of each other's clothes. This especial yellow gown was puzzling; "not pretty exactly, but odd;" "not becoming certainly, but deliciously quaint." Finally the hostess whispered to one of her intimates, under cover of the music issuing from a bower of palms: "I am enchanted with her, my dear. I made sure she would wear that thing to-night. She is rather a guy, no doubt, but the decorative effect of it couldn't be surpassed. In that corner next to my tapestry portière, she is as good as a yellow jug."

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A FRENCH lady of distinction recently wore a dress copied from a portrait of Marguerite of Valois, and nothing more beautiful could have been imagined. The material was white brocade, the design outlined in pearls, and the collar was wrought entirely of pearl beads threaded in intricate design. A large fan of pink feathers hung at her side. On the same occasion was seen an evening dress of modern French design so elegant as to call forth much comment. The petticoat was made of pale yellow silk muslin, trimmed profusely with white lace. The low bronze-brown satin bodice and train were brocaded with large yellow roses. A bouquet of natural yellow roses was worn at the waist, and the same flowers in the hair. A fan of amber tortoise-shell with undyed ostrich feathers, and long wrinkled gloves of pale yellow Swedish leather completed the toilette.

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A WORD of protest should be uttered against the overwhelming use of stuffed birds in season and out of season, one might say, in personal adornment. Birds

of a feather no longer flock together, and from every clime their plumage is summoned to be united on efforts of modern millinery skill. This fashion seems utterly barbarous, and quite on a par with woad and nose-rings. Bright green parrots of dazzling hue are perched upon bonnets of crimson plush. Humming birds and Impeyan pheasants, birds-of-paradise and robin red-breasts are fastened upon bonnets and on muffs. At the French ball at the Casino a conspicuous costume was one of silver gray tulle over satin, garnished with a fisherman's net of silver cord, caught at intervals on skirt and bodice with large blue birds. The head-dress, a small oblong butterfly-net, was secured upon the chignon with another outspread bird.

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AFTER birds, beads are the mania of the hour. Not only jet bugles and beads, nets and fringes, appear as persistently as if they were never seen before, but beads of garnet, sapphire, emerald and topaz, of iridescent sheen, are used with prodigal extravagance. Garlands of flowers worked in beads representing their natural colors are a costly novelty for adorning satin and velvet surfaces. At the opera, one sees low bodices completely covered with sparkling black or white beads; and a sleeveless Jersey of pale-colored iridescent beads has also been exhibited there. Belts covered with beads are being superseded by belts set with jewels, like the famous one Eugénie wore at the court balls during the second empire, and that recently assumed by the Queen of Italy at Vienna. For dancing, this style of belt or corselet suggests manifold objections, and in general effect there is always an association with the glories of spectacular drama. Rodrigues, who has made a specialty of bodices covered with multi-colored beads to wear with any toilet, demands a thousand francs for one of her glittering cuirasses. Forty and fifty dollars a yard are prices commonly asked in Broadway shops for the passementeries in colored beads reproducing old Roman, Byzantine, and Celtic traceries. All this we have but to imagine cheaply imitated, as even now it begins to be, and the downfall of these extravagant fancies will not be slow to follow.

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SPEAKING of economy, a frank being who avows herself an officer's wife with a horror of much luggage, writes for one of the English journals an ingenious account of her original method of making one gown contrive a double debt to pay, while going the rounds of her country-house visits. "We will suppose my visit to be for two nights," she says, "a dinner the first night, a ball the second. The skirt I will describe is of white satin, the bodice, perfectly plain, cut low and square, and beautifully fitting, no sleeves. This is the 'fond' of my two dresses. On the first night I wear over the skirt a tunic of heavy white Spanish blonde, with a high guimpe of the same worn under the bodice. A large bouquet of dark red roses, very long red mittens, large red fan, and 'me voilà!' The next night, on the low satin body I tack a berth of gold-embroidered tulle with spangle fringe. Over the skirt I wear a tunic of gold-embroidered tulle, satin, and fringe, with huge sunflowers on skirt and bodice. With yellow fan and gloves I am again complete." We may venture to assert that most of our countrywomen would have been better satisfied to wear the same gown twice without the gold fringe and spangles. But perhaps this is the sort of thing husbands dream of, when they inveigh against large trunks—who knows?

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A BRILLIANT mediæval costume is that worn by Modjeska in "Juana," the play recently written for her by Wills. It is a brocaded dress with a running pattern of green and brown leaves and red blossoms on a cream ground; the skirt, opening on the left side, reveals a petticoat of white silk, the train lined with Venetian red with knots of Venetian red and aiguillettes of gold. The square-cut bodice fastened behind has round basques, the sleeves have puffs of muslin at the elbow with deep cuffs of brocaded silk. The neck is covered with a muslin chemisette. The long, flowing hair is bound by a golden circlet. In the second act, as Juana the matron, Madame Modjeska wears a magnificent gray brocade bordered with golden plush over a petticoat of brocaded gold satin, and her beautiful head is coiffed by a small jewelled cap. In her bridal robe of pure "white samite, mystic, wonderful," her

neck and hair strung with emeralds, a jewelled girdle round her waist, Modjeska makes a most effective picture, fair and shining as a mediæval saint on the page of an illuminated missal.

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THE fashion of giving "bals blancs" in Parisian society (which correspond with our "rosebud dinners," where only young and unmarried people are invited), has accentuated in a manner that might, and should, be very useful to us, the French custom of employing only simple toilettes for girls in their first seasons. Pink blue, and white Indian muslins embroidered with silk gauze, nun's veiling, tulle, and silk batiste, are the materials most in vogue, the ornaments to correspond consisting of garlands and necklets of small roses, white heather, snowdrops, forget-me-nots, orchids, lilies-of-the-valley and lilac.

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CONTRAST these virginal tints and fabrics with the splendor assumed by most American debutantes upon their appearance at the first Delmonico Ball, for example, where they are to run the gauntlet of critical eyes and tongues. In many instances, the young lady is arrayed in a massive silk brocade or satin damask, the sleeves and bodice encrusted with pearl beads. There is literally nothing left to assume for her bridal costume, save the veil and orange blossoms. And, to put the finishing touch, her arms are laden with bouquets of costly flowers, flowers so abundant and so self-assertive as to suggest irresistibly the mot of a cruel wit, last season, when asked to admire the fragrant burden upheld to him by a blushing "rose-bud," "How kind of your papa!"

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ONE is struck with the change that has come over ornaments for personal decoration of late years. Diamonds and pearls are, of course, pre-eminent in fashion for evening dress; that is one of the laws immutable of Madame La Mode. But diamonds are wonderfully counterfeited just now, and many ladies have frankly adopted Rhine pebbles, which in comb, crescent-shaped brooch and oblong or oval buckles, make a brave glitter by candlelight. Jargon, an ancient mineral more brilliant than paste, is liberally worn in France. Roman pearls, like imitation lace, now come boldly to the front, three or four rows of them fastened by a tiny paste clasp being considered admissible in evening toilette. Flies, butterflies, flowers, and birds made of small brilliants are dotted about the hair and corsage. A fanciful gift conferred recently upon the young American prima donna Mlle. Van Zandt by Baroness Willy de Rothschild, in acknowledgment of her beautiful rendering of the baroness's song "Legères Hirondelles," was a half dozen diamond swallows intended to be worn as ornaments for the bodice. Swallows in black and white enamel on silver are the latest fancy for securing bonnet-strings in Paris.

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PIGS and elephants, as portes-bonheurs, may have had their day, but the reign of the fantastic still endures. Where gold appears in necklets, one sees no more the old-fashioned chain and locket, except, indeed, when worn outside a sealskin jacket in a street car; but instead are finest bits of Etruscan plaques, caught together by fairy links. Amethystine trinkets from Auvergne, enamels from the Campagna, filigree work in silver from the booths at Tunis, golden strings of berries brought by sailors from the Antilles, and chains of red scarabei dotted with yellow spots, which, sewn upon velvet for the neck, are called "les bêtes du bon Dieu," are the modern favorites in France.

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IN England the fashion of wearing broad velvet bands surmounting two or three rows of necklaces in evening dress, will probably endure so long as the swan-necked Princess of Wales leads the van. In New York this custom of swathing the throat and leaving the wide expanse of shoulders bare, has grown to be regarded as a distinguishing mark of the votaries of English fashion in society. An indispensable accompaniment, however, is the modest frizz of hair over the eyebrows, offset by a parsimonious arrangement of the remaining locks into the smallest possible knot, low on the "nuque" behind. Thus equipped, there is no mistaking them—I mean the Anglo-maniacs.

C. C. H.